

CHES Progresses on Certificate Systems Overhaul

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After months of hard work, the Center for Health and Environmental Statistics (CHES) is nearing finalization of birth and death certificates processing changes that will be implemented in January 2005 in Kansas. The revision, the first since 1989, is accompanied by a re-engineering of the vital statistics system.

The current vital statistics process is predominately paper driven. The upgrade positions CHES closer to an all-electronic registration process. The new system uses a secure web-enabled process for birth registration and sets the stage for the eventual implementation of a web-enabled electronic death registration system.

The impetus for the change is the national revision of birth and death certificates. State Registrars, including Dr. Lorne A. Phillips, met with National Center for Health Statistics staff to develop standard certificates that every state would adopt for data collection and submission. This enables the collection of a uniform national dataset.

So what's different on the revised certificates? Not a lot in the issuable portion – the certificate is still a civil registration document. However, the confidential or medical portion will be changing.

More information will be collected on tobacco use: the number of cigarettes smoked daily before and during the pregnancy and whether tobacco contributed to an individual's death. Birth certificates will collect data on payment for the birth, enabling researchers to better analyze birth outcomes by healthcare coverage. Other changes to the medical portion of the birth certificate include collecting new perinatal characteristics about the birth and mother.

In keeping with the Office of Management and Budget Directive 15 on reporting race, the certificates will alter the way race data is collected. Persons will be able to check as many of the 15 available race categories that apply, and multiple races will also be possible through this change. Expanded Hispanic ethnicity categories will also be included. The certificate will also continue to collect ancestry information. Four countries of origin will be accepted.

The department hired Man Tech, a software developer with previous experience in creating vital statistics data systems, to develop the new Kansas vital statistics information system. The firm has developed systems for other states. Among the features of the new system is a bar coding process to facilitate the matching of the paper birth certificates with data received from a hospital. To reduce problems and

errors, vital statistics staff will be able to leave messages for hospitals via the web-based system.

Concurrent with the upgrade, the Center's Office of Vital Statistics is scanning birth certificates from prior to 1925 to optical disk. Once the scanning is complete, staff will be able to quickly search and issue certificates back to 1911 from optical images. Currently those records are saved to aging microfilm and in some cases referenced through old hand-written indexes.

The upgrade effort has involved almost everyone in CHES as well as other KDHE employees. CHES staff, who work with the documents daily, have provided valuable insight into how to make the process more efficient while maintaining the Center's ability to provide certified copies in a timely manner. Other KDHE employees have commented on items to be added to the certificates and provided input on data system structure.

In January 2005, the Center's goal is to have the new system online and operating.